
City's Weekend Effort Pays Off With Praises By Democrat Official

By LAWRENCE BUSER

Memphis received top marks from a Democratic National Committee official yesterday as the committee began clearing out of Cook Convention Center — its home for three months.

"There would be no hesitation on the part of the DNC to recommend Memphis as a convention center," said Mario Cooper, deputy arrangements director of the Democrats' site committee.

"But the highest recommendation would be to the people of Memphis themselves who showed friendliness and concern for the delegates. Many (delegates) had concerns about the strikes or the Mark Lane statements (of possible violence against officials), but I think all that concern was negated with the people they met in Memphis and the treatment they received."

Standing amid stacks of cardboard boxes filled with memos, papers and receipts, Cooper said 60 Democratic staff members left yesterday and the remaining 15 would be gone by Thursday morning.

"Everybody wants to get home to their own bed and refrigerator," said Cooper. "We're trying to figure out what our bills are so we can leave town with a clean slate."

Rep. Harold Ford of Memphis said the convention was the most beneficial event for the city in years.

"It's hard to believe the impact of this convention," said Ford, predicting new interest in the city by public and private groups.

"At no time in the last 10 years has anything like this happened to give the city the type of image it deserves. When I go back to Washington, people will be talking about Memphis. Memphis left a good impression on them."

Ford said he hoped federal agencies, as well as private corporations, will consider moving some offices to Memphis. "Everyone has talked about Memphis so they think this might be the place to be," he said.

Earlier this year, the government's Equal Employment Opportunity Commission announced it would move 100 of its positions to offices in the city.

Cooper praised the Cook center and its staff. He reflected on the complex arrangements required for transportation, housing and credentials for almost 7,000 persons and said only 200 persons were angry because of problems.

"That's a good percentage," he said. "The city should be very proud of the staff here."

He said the 1974 midterm conference in Kansas City and the 1976 presidential nominating convention in New York had more problems, such as missed deadlines, scheduling difficulties and equipment that did not work.

"Everyone from the director to the house cleaning and operations staff pitched in and came forth with an extra effort to see the facility was clean and maintained in good shape," said Bill Hays, deputy director of the convention center.

There were complaints from many delegates about the few concession stands serving hot dogs and ham sandwiches. Hays said the problems with long lines can be solved if the center's contract with Ogden Food Service is dissolved. The center will draw up a list of approved caterers for convention groups to choose from, he said.

The center and Ogden, which have been at odds over contract requirements for several years, recently tentatively agreed to end the pact.

Jeff Beckelman, president of the Convention & Visitors Bureau, said it is too early to determine the economic impact of the convention on the city, though he said he is preparing a report that should be completed by the end of the week. Earlier estimates were that \$1.5 million to \$2 million would be spent by delegates at local businesses.

Beckelman praised the Memphis Area Transit Authority for its performance in transporting delegates to and from 30 different hotels. He said the scattered hotels made transportation a key factor in the success or failure of the convention.

"That was my biggest concern before the convention," he said. "A convention of this size always will use a large transportation network and we learned MATA can put together a first class transportation network. We will ask the DNC to give us a letter of recommendation for the fact MATA can do a good job."

Site official Cooper applauded the transportation efforts of the city and said the Democrats would not hesitate to write such a letter.

Beckelman said four groups have made inquiries about holding conventions in Memphis based on publicity from the Democratic conference. The groups range in size from 200 to 600 persons, and one may sign a commitment this week, Beckelman said.

Beckelman said he felt the city could handle a major political convention, such as that in New York in 1976 which attracted some 17,000 persons, though he said the

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By David Darnell

distance of hotels from the center would be a fact the party would have to accept.

Cooper said, however, the site selection committee, which will begin looking for a 1980 convention location in January, requires a city to have at least 20,000 hotel rooms before it will be considered for a nominating convention. Convention bureau officials here say the city has 9,000 hotel rooms, including those in West Memphis.

Beckelman said his office's sights are on

the city's next big convention, that of the Discover America Travel Organization May 11-16.

"I almost rank this convention as more important than the Democratic convention since there'll be 2,000 people here and 600 will be travel agents who will be selling Memphis when they go home if they like it," said Beckelman. "We're in the process of putting together a host committee for that similar to the one we had for the Democrats."